



Traffic loss, analysed.

Northstar Living

Illustrative traffic loss investigation

Cut-off: 12 June 2026

Prepared for management deciding what caused a commercially material organic decline, what action is justified now and how recovery should be verified.

What this report is for

A forensic test of a reported organic traffic loss—not a general SEO audit or a promise of recovery.

The report answers five questions:

- 01

Reality

Is the reported loss real and commercially material?
- 02

Timing

When did it begin, and what changed around that date?
- 03

Failure state

Did crawling, indexing, ranking, clicks or demand fail first?
- 04

Cause

Which explanation survives timing, shape, segment and mechanism tests?
- 05

Response

What action is justified, and how should recovery be verified?

Boundary

This report does not guarantee recovery, estimate speculative upside or substitute correlation for causation. It separates what is observed, derived, estimated and inferred.

Contents

The executive answer comes first. The evidence then follows the incident from preservation to verification.

04-07	Executive answer
08-11	Reality and timeline
12-16	Failure state
17-23	Cause testing
24-27	Recovery and response
28-30	Decision record and reliance

The loss is real. The release is the primary cause.

Organic clicks fell 38% and organic-attributed revenue fell 31% after the 14 April category-template release. The simultaneous Google update is not the best-supported primary explanation.

F-001-F-006 · EV-001-EV-024

Organic clicks	Organic revenue	Commercial categories	Informational clicks
-38%	-31%	-47%	-16%

Primary conclusion

Restore the affected template controls first. Treat content quality as a secondary workstream, not the explanation for the whole loss.

Conclusion	Decision use
The release explains the material incident. F-001-F-006	Approve containment and correction; reject a sitewide rewrite.

Three-sentence verdict

The shortest version management can safely repeat.

- 1** **The loss is genuine, organic-specific and concentrated in category and filtered listing pages.**

- 2** **The 14 April template release fits the date, shape, affected segments and technical mechanism; the Google update does not.**

- 3** **Recovery is plausible only where canonicalisation, indexability and internal-link signals are restored and verified; no recovery percentage is promised.**

Do these three things before changing anything else

The response sequence protects evidence, reverses the supported mechanism and creates a clean verification window.

- 01

Preserve

Freeze exports, release artefacts, rendered HTML and current indexation evidence.
- 02

Correct

Restore canonical, robots and internal-link behaviour for affected category templates.
- 03

Verify

Re-crawl, sample URL Inspection and compare affected pages with stable controls.

Conclusion

Do not commission a sitewide content rewrite, link campaign or migration while the supported technical mechanism remains active.

A-001-A-006

Decision use

Contain first; correct second; verify before broader work.

Every finding carries its source and its confidence

The grade determines what a finding is allowed to conclude. No verdict rests on an inference alone.

Observed	Directly measured in preserved data or records.	May establish fact within the evidenced period.
Derived	Calculated from observed data using a stated method.	May support a decision if the method is accepted.
Estimated	Modelled from observed data, a sample or benchmark.	Directional; assumptions and ranges stay visible.
Inferred	A reasoned explanation not directly observed.	May frame a test; cannot carry the verdict alone.

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01 Reality and timeline

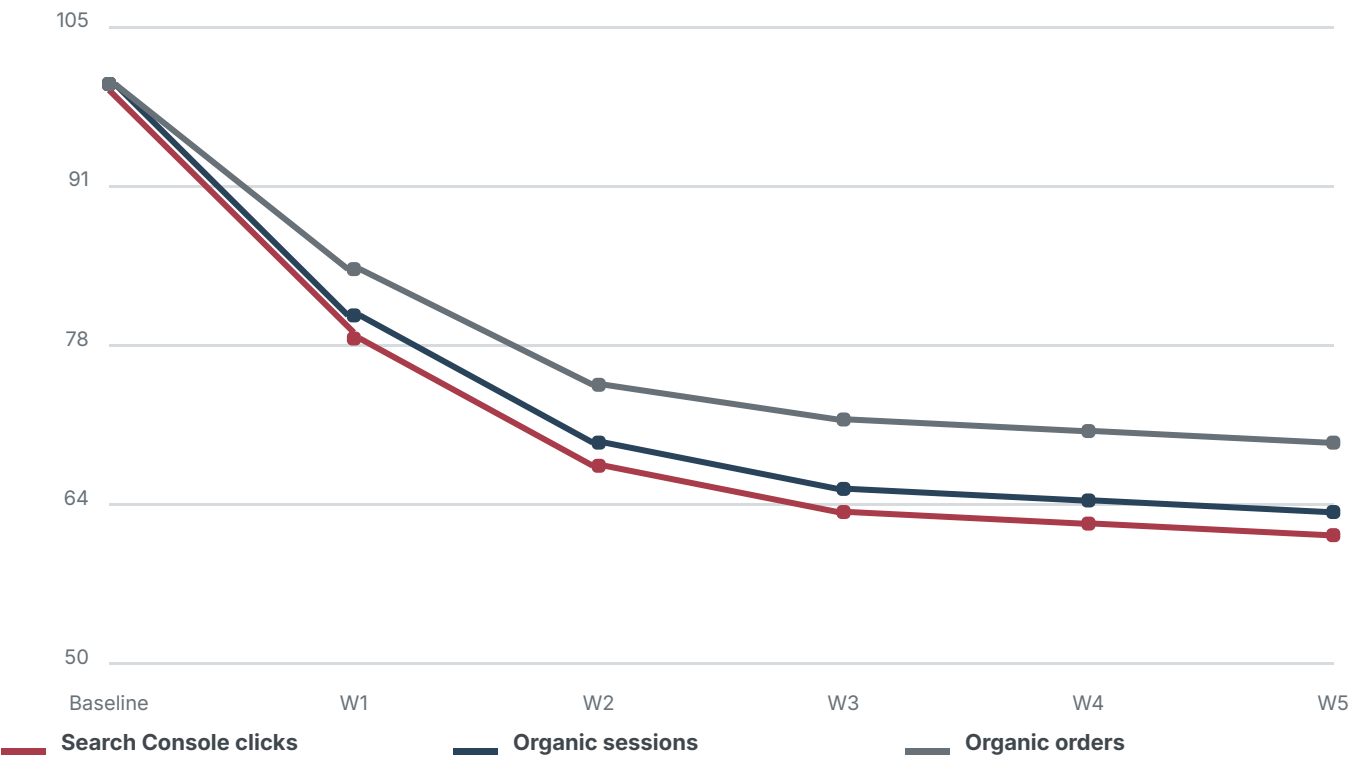
Is the reported loss real, when did it begin, and what changed in the plausible causal window?

The conclusion is limited to what the preserved evidence can support.

Three independent measures confirm a real loss

Search Console clicks, analytics sessions and organic-attributed orders move together. No tracking, consent or attribution change explains the magnitude.

F-001 · EV-001-EV-005



Indexed to 100 in the four-week pre-release baseline.

Conclusion

The loss is real and organic-specific.

F-001 · EV-001-EV-005

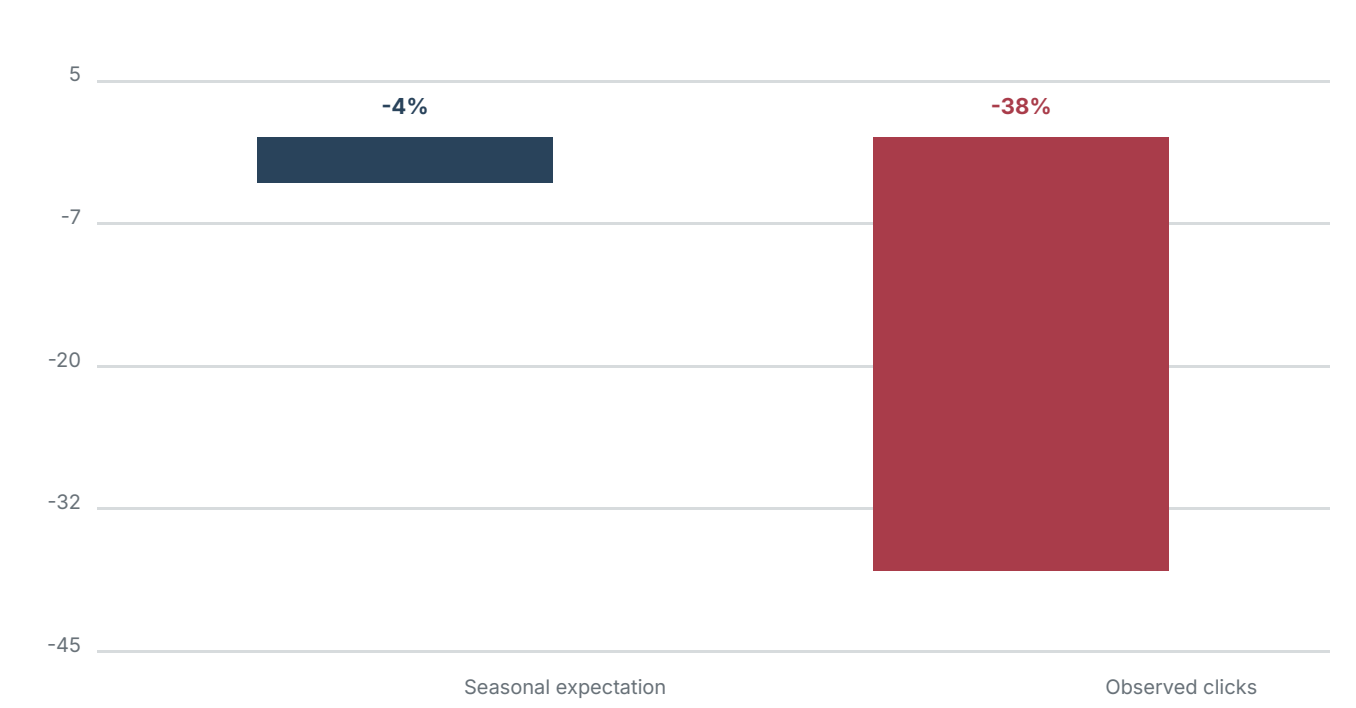
Decision use

Proceed to causal analysis; do not treat this as a measurement incident.

Seasonality cannot explain the observed gap

The like-for-like baseline predicts a 4% decline. The observed decline is 38%, leaving a 34-point unexplained gap.

F-002 · EV-006-EV-008



Unexplained gap

34 pts

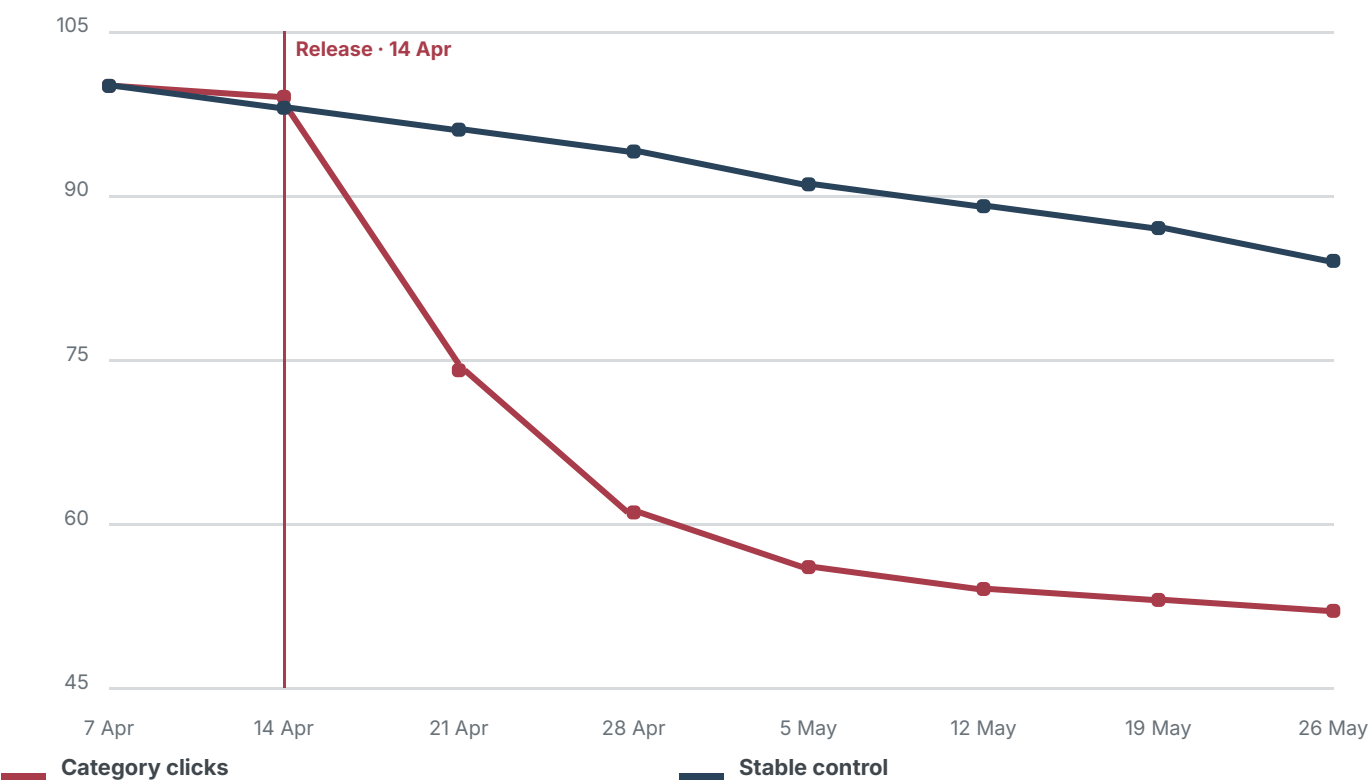
The counterfactual uses the same calendar weeks from the two complete prior years and excludes promotional spikes.

Conclusion Normal demand movement is too small and too broad to explain the loss. F-002 · EV-006-EV-008	Decision use Do not normalise the decline away as seasonality.
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The loss begins within 48 hours of the category-template release

The changepoint precedes the date management noticed the decline by 12 days. The Google update began in the same week, creating a plausible but incomplete first story.

F-003 · EV-009-EV-012



17 Apr · Google core update begins

Conclusion

Timing makes both candidates. Only segment and mechanism tests distinguish them.

F-003 · EV-009-EV-012

Decision use

Keep both hypotheses open at this stage.

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02 Failure state

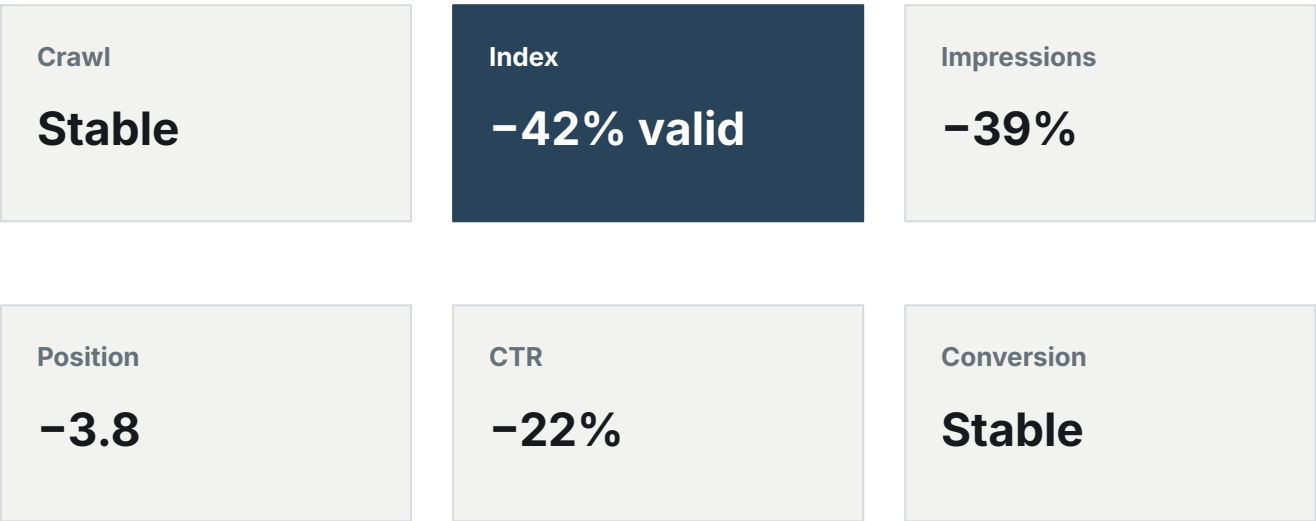
Is this a crawling, indexing, ranking, click, demand or conversion loss—and where does the first failure occur?

The conclusion is limited to what the preserved evidence can support.

The first failed state is index eligibility, not demand

Affected category URLs lose index coverage and impressions before positions and clicks decline. Conversion on retained organic visits remains stable.

F-004 · EV-013-EV-016



The sequence matters: a ranking plan does not repair an index-eligibility failure.

Conclusion

The failure begins at indexing eligibility. Ranking and click loss follow downstream.

F-004 · EV-013-EV-016

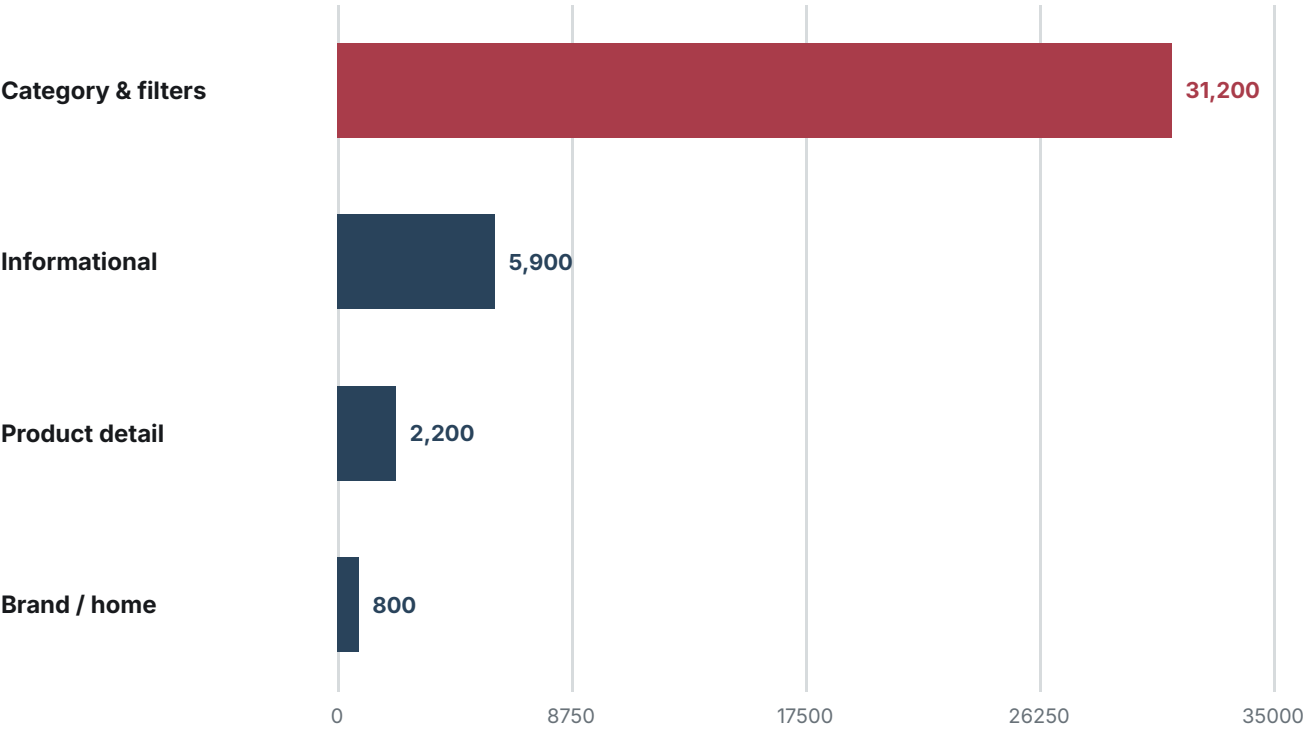
Decision use

Fix index signals before content or authority work.

Category templates account for 78% of absolute click loss

The sitewide percentage hides a concentrated failure. Product detail and editorial pages provide useful controls because they share demand conditions but not the released template.

F-005 · EV-017-EV-020



Share of absolute loss

78%

Concentrated in one template family and the filtered URLs it controls.

Conclusion

The loss pattern follows the released category template, not the whole domain.

F-005 · EV-017-EV-020

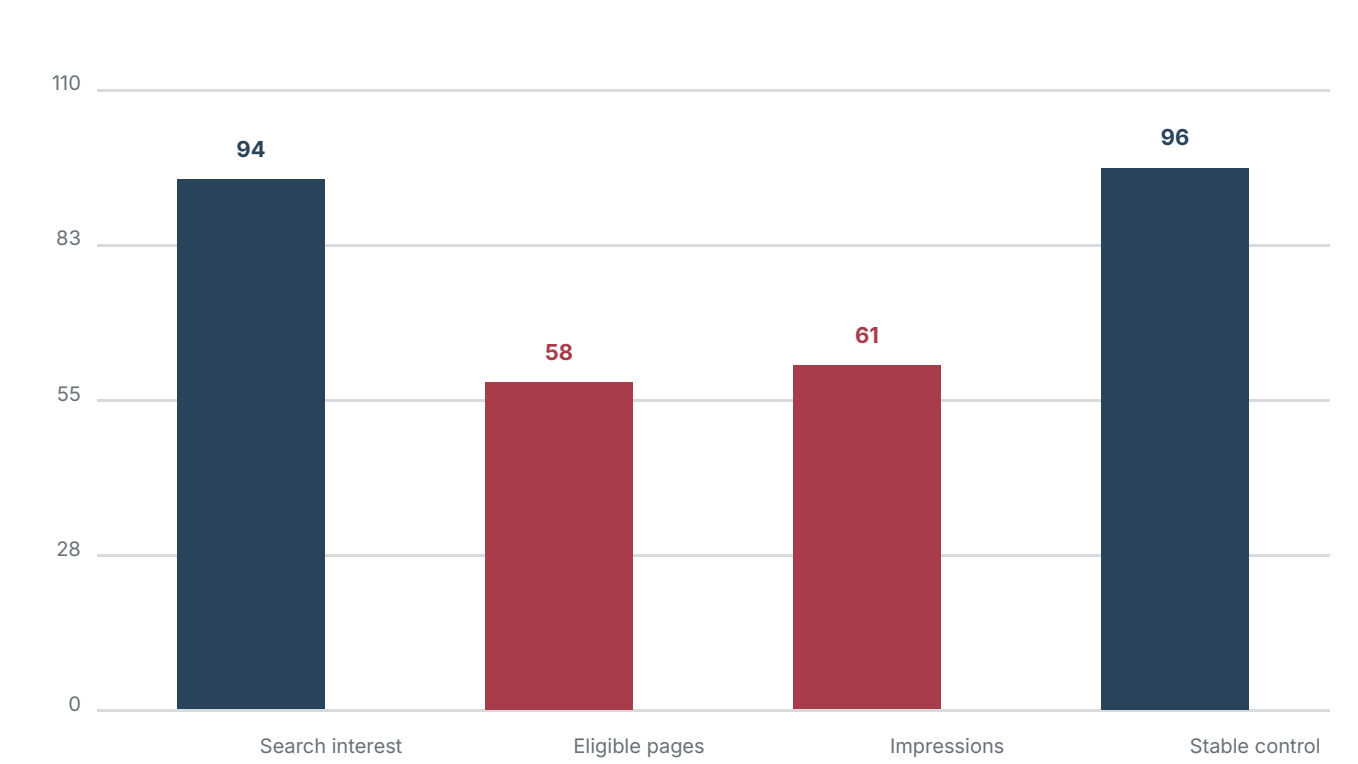
Decision use

Scope remediation to affected templates and cohorts.

Demand remained; eligible pages stopped receiving it

Commercial query impressions fall sharply for affected category URLs while aggregate search interest remains within 6% of baseline.

F-004-F-006 · EV-014-EV-020



Indexed to the pre-release baseline. The discontinuity is in site eligibility, not the market.

Conclusion

A demand-only explanation is rejected.

F-004-F-006

Decision use

Do not wait for market demand to return.

The affected URLs can be named and tested

These examples demonstrate the pattern; the workbook contains the full cohort and verification fields.

U-001-U-005 · EV-017-EV-024

URL	Observed change	Index state	ID
/collections/sofas	Canonical points to parent: /living	-52%	U-001
/collections/dining-tables	Inherits noindex from filter rule	-48%	U-002
/collections/beds	Internal links removed from nav module	-44%	U-003
/collections/storage?room=*	Self-canonical removed	-61%	U-004
/collections/lighting	Stable control template	-5%	U-005

Conclusion

The mechanism is observable at URL level and has a stable control.

F-004-F-006 · U-001-U-005

Decision use

Use the named cohort for remediation and verification.

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03 Cause testing

Which explanation survives the date, shape, segment and mechanism tests—and which plausible stories do not?

The conclusion is limited to what the preserved evidence can support.

One hypothesis survives all four causal tests

Temporal proximity alone is not enough. Each candidate must fit timing, shape, affected segments and a plausible mechanism.

Hypothesis register H-01–H-06

ID	Hypothesis	Result	Why
H-01	Template release	Primary	Fits all four tests
H-02	Google core update	Contributing	Fits date; weak segment/mechanism fit
H-03	Demand decline	Ruled out	Magnitude and controls do not fit
H-04	Tracking failure	Ruled out	Independent measures reconcile
H-05	Competitor displacement	Contributing	Gradual, not abrupt
H-06	Manual action/security	Ruled out	No observed evidence

Conclusion The release is primary; update and competition are secondary. H-01–H-06	Decision use Commission the response against H-01; monitor H-02 and H-05.
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The release changed three signals on the affected template

The deploy diff, rendered HTML, crawl and URL Inspection samples show a coherent mechanism from release to loss.

F-006 · EV-021-EV-024

01

Canonical

Category pages inherit parent canonicals.

02

Indexability

Filtered commercial pages inherit noindex.

03

Internal links

Navigation module removes category links.

04

Outcome

Valid pages and impressions contract.

Conclusion

The technical mechanism is directly evidenced and capable of the measured loss.

F-006 · EV-021-EV-024

Decision use

Restore the prior signal set under controlled release.

The Google update is nearby, but does not explain the main loss

The update overlaps the incident window, yet unaffected templates and comparable competitors do not show the same abrupt category-specific pattern.

H-02 · EV-025-EV-027

Test	Result	Meaning
Date	Fits	Temporal lead only
Shape	Weak fit	Main incident is abrupt
Segment	Fails	Loss follows released template
Mechanism	Fails	Technical mechanism is observed

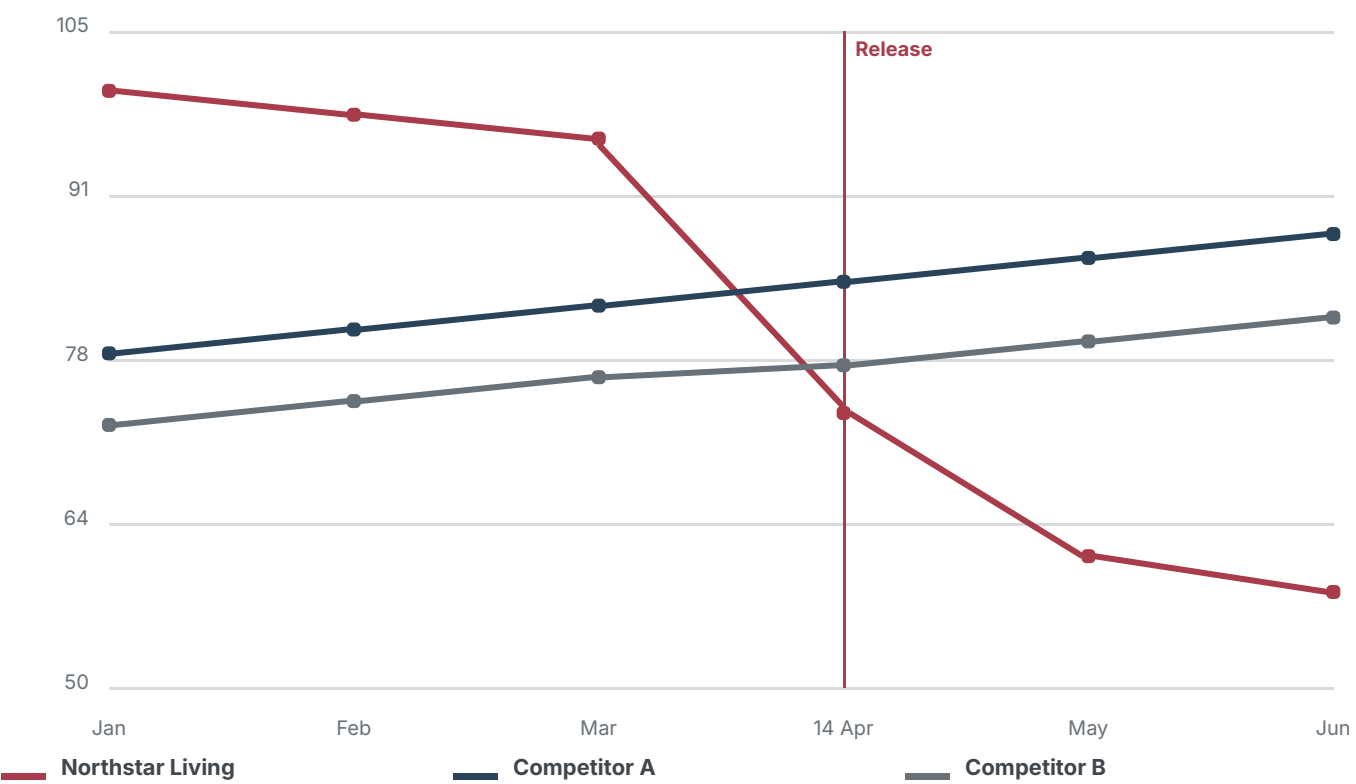
A temporal match is a lead. It is not proof.

Conclusion The update may contribute to the slower informational decline, but it is not the primary cause. H-02 · EV-025-EV-027	Decision use Do not apply a sitewide “algorithm recovery” programme.
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Competition explains gradual erosion, not the incident

Two competitors gained across the commercial query set before and after the release, but neither explains the abrupt timing or template concentration of the incident.

H-05 · EV-028-EV-030



Relative visibility index. The release date is a lead; the mechanism test establishes causation.

Conclusion

Competition is a contributing pressure, not the incident trigger.

H-05 · F-008 · EV-028-EV-030

Decision use

Do not confuse maintenance need with root cause.

AI answers reduced clicks on advice journeys—not category eligibility

Answer-led features appear on 43% of sampled informational queries. The exposed cohort loses CTR without comparable indexation loss.

H-07 · F-009 · EV-031-EV-034

Informational queries with AI answers

43%

CTR change in exposed cohort

-18%

Index coverage change

-3%

This is a different failure state from the category incident. Combining them would produce the wrong remedy.

Conclusion

AI/SERP displacement contributes to informational click loss only.

H-07 · F-009 · EV-031-EV-034

Decision use

Track separately; do not use a sitewide AI score or haircut.

The rejected explanations are part of the result

A confident diagnosis is only worth as much as the plausible alternatives it survives.

H-03,H-04,H-06 · EV-001-EV-034

Explanation	Why rejected
Tracking failure	GSC, analytics and orders reconcile.
Seasonality	Explains four points, not 38.
Demand collapse	Search interest remains within 6% of baseline.
Manual action	No action present at cut-off.
Security incident	No compromise or release evidence.
Sitewide crawl outage	Stable controls remain eligible and visible.

Conclusion Rejected explanations remain recorded with the evidence used to reject them. Rejected hypotheses	Decision use Prevents the same unsupported story returning in the recovery plan.
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04 Recovery and response

What action is justified now, what may recover, and how will completion and recovery be verified?

The conclusion is limited to what the preserved evidence can support.

Technical recovery is plausible; the amount is unknowable

The primary mechanism is reversible, but index reprocessing, competitive change and demand mean the pre-loss baseline is not a promise.

F-010 · EV-035-EV-038

Pressure	Basis	Confidence
Technical recovery	Category eligibility and internal links	High
Structural drag	AI/SERP click loss on advice journeys	Moderate
Market pressure	Gradual commercial erosion	Moderate
Unknown	Residual interaction effects	Explicitly unresolved

A direction is supportable. A recovery percentage is not.

Conclusion Technical correction has a credible recovery pathway, but no percentage can be responsibly promised. F-010 · EV-035-EV-038	Decision use Approve correction with explicit verification and no guarantee.
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The response is sequenced around evidence and reversibility

Every action has an owner, timing and acceptance test. The workbook carries the full dependency and status record.

A-001-A-009

ID	Action	Owner	Timing	Acceptance evidence
A-001	Preserve exports, release artefacts, crawl and rendered HTML	SEO + Data	0–2 days	Immutable evidence pack
A-002	Stop affected-template propagation and protect stable controls	Product + Eng	0–2 days	Freeze or scoped release evidenced
A-003–006	Restore canonical, robots and internal-link behaviour	Engineering	2–15 days	Staged and live rendered tests pass
A-007–009	Verify eligibility, affected/control cohorts and orders	SEO + Data	3–8 weeks	V-001–V-012 complete

Conclusion

Actions move from evidence preservation to verified correction; optimisation comes last.

A-001-A-009

Decision use

Use the action register as the delivery and QA record.

Ticket closure is not recovery evidence

Implementation is complete only when technical state is verified. Recovery is assessed separately against affected and control cohorts.

A-004-A-008 · V-001-V-007

Implementation acceptance

- * Correct canonical output in rendered HTML.
- * Priority pages regain valid index status.
- * Internal links restored in crawl graph.

Recovery verification

- * Affected impressions recover relative to controls.
- * Clicks improve without demand distortion.
- * Commercial outcomes reconcile to the same cohort.

Conclusion

Technical completion and commercial recovery are separate tests.

A-004-A-008 · V-001-V-007

Decision use

Do not close the incident because code shipped.

Approve a targeted correction, not a general recovery programme

The evidence supports a finite technical response to the category-template failure and a separate maintenance plan for informational content and competition.

Final decision · F-001-F-010 · A-001-A-009

Priority cohort	Immediate actions	Verification checks	Recovery guarantee
148 URLs	6	12	None

Approved response

Preserve evidence, correct the affected template controls, verify the technical state, then measure the affected cohort against stable controls.

Conclusion	Decision use
Restore the evidenced template controls; retain secondary pressures as separate workstreams.	Management approval and owner assignment.
Decision	

The report holds the decision; the workbook holds the audit trail

No material conclusion should require management to reconstruct the analysis from raw exports. The workbook exists for traceability, challenge and delivery.

Report

- * Executive answer and causal conclusion
- * Material charts and decisive examples
- * Finding, evidence and hypothesis IDs
- * Action order and verification logic

Workbook and source folder

- * Evidence, hypothesis and findings registers
- * Timeline, cohorts and URL-level working data
- * Action and verification registers
- * Immutable exports and calculation trail

[Open the illustrative workbook](#)

Navigation convention

Report references use EV- for evidence, H- for hypotheses, F- for findings, A- for actions, U- for URLs and V- for verification.

Reliance and cut-off

The conclusion is bounded by the evidence preserved and the state of the site at 12 June 2026.

This illustrative report demonstrates the structure and level of analysis used in a Discern Traffic Loss Investigation. The company, data, people, releases, domains and figures are fictional.

In a live engagement, factual statements are made as at the cut-off date. Subsequent releases, algorithm changes, market shifts or new evidence may change the conclusion. Unresolved items remain unresolved unless new evidence is supplied and tested.

The work does not guarantee recovery and is not legal, financial or valuation advice. It establishes which explanation is best supported, what response follows and how results should be verified.

Discern Search Ltd

Independent SEO due diligence, traffic-loss investigation and risk audits.